

FYI: Peter

126th  
Maine Senate

3 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0003

November 6, 2013

COF

Governor Paul R. LePage  
1 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Governor LePage:

We write to express frustration with your administration's unprecedented lack of cooperation with the Legislature.

In recent weeks, your commissioners and/or legislative liaisons have refused nearly 30 requests to participate in important legislative meetings. Your administration and the people whose jobs it is to liaise between the departments and the Legislature have refused to appear before our committees to testify on critical issues, including public safety, health care, education and workforce development.

In lieu of in-person communication, you have determined that in-writing communication will suffice. We disagree. We live in a fast-moving communication age. Exchanging letters between departments and legislative committees does not work in the dynamic committee setting where follow up questions are often the norm, not a static, essay-style "question" and "answer" format.

As Chairs of the Committees charged with oversight of these crucial policy areas, we have great concern that this lack of cooperation and participation will hurt Maine people.

It is our responsibility to hold state offices accountable to their missions and to the people of Maine, and to ensure transparency in government and to protect the public interest. If we, as lawmakers sitting on committees of jurisdiction, are unable to obtain current information in critical areas, we will be unable to make informed policy decisions - decisions that are best for our people and for our state.

If we are unable to gather reliable information about the state's fiscal situation, we will be unable to maintain a balanced budget and meet our obligations to our towns, schools, and citizens.

If we don't have answers from the Department of Education, we cannot move forward with plans for teacher evaluations. If we don't have answers from the Department of Economic and Community Development, we can't continue solving the state's workforce skills gap.

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If we don't have answers from the Bureau of Insurance, we can't move forward with plans to make hospital prices more transparent so Mainers aren't overcharged exorbitant amounts for care.

And if we don't have answers from the Department of Environmental Protection, we can't ensure we make the right decisions about our solid waste laws.

Since you issued new guidelines requiring all requests for commissioners to appear before our committees be approved directly by you, our invitations have been repeatedly declined.

We cannot govern together if you have put a gag order on your staff.

In previous communications, you have said the State of Maine will be governed by you, not by legislative committees. However, according to the Constitution, the Legislature and the Governor's Office are equal branches of government that must collaborate and share information to best serve the people we represent.

We cannot overstate the importance of communication and collaboration between your commissioners, department staff, legislative liaisons, and the committees of oversight. It's crucial, if we are to achieve the best outcomes for the people we serve.

We are determined to resolve this quickly and in advance of the next legislative session.

There is much work to be done.

We hope that these unprecedented restrictions will be lifted and commissioners will again be allowed to respond promptly and thoroughly to questions or invitations from the Legislature. We are eager work together to govern our state.

Sincerely,

Senator John Patrick  
Senator Ed Mazurek  
Senator Rebecca Millett  
Senator Anne Haskell  
Senator David Dutremble  
Senator Emily Cain  
Senator Stan Gerzofsky  
Senator Margaret Craven  
Senator Colleen Lachowicz  
Senator Dawn Hill  
Senator Linda Valentino  
Senator Geoff Gratwick

Representative Walter Kumiega  
Representative Michael Shaw  
Representative Erin Herbig  
Representative Adam Goode  
Representative Peggy Rotundo  
Representative Anne Graham  
Representative Joan Welsh  
Representative Sharon Treat  
Representative Bruce MacDonald  
Representative Richard Farnsworth  
Representative Seth Berry  
Representative James Dill

